



QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to look into some of higher education commission's initiatives for improving the quality of higher education. The study addresses a) Higher education commission (HEC) initiatives to improve research and development in the universities b) the implications of these initiatives on human resource development, and c) the major successes and failures as a result of these initiatives. Narrative data were collected through observation and documents analysis. The result of HEC's impetus is that the universities are streamlining their mission and objectives to excel in the field of research. The university teachers are gradually realizing the significance of research in their academic and professional success. Research and Development (R&D) culture is growing through research and publications, organization of conferences, seminars and workshops in the universities.

KEY WORDS: Higher Education, Research and Development.

Introduction

This study aims to focus on Higher Education Commission (HEC) initiatives towards Research and Development (R&D), and their implications on Human Resource Development (HRD) and quality assurance in the universities. Lemaitre (2008) says that quality improvement recognizes that the responsibility of quality lies within the higher education institutions; it also focuses on their ability to develop and apply effective policies and mechanism for self-regulation, and the continued advancement towards quality. Quality is not any single thing but an aura, an atmosphere and an overpowering feeling that the institution is doing everything with excellence (Rauf, 2004).

Quality in Higher Education: Issues and Current Practices

Today, more than ever before in human history the wealth or poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Quality of higher education has become a benchmark for the success of a nation. Those countries that have realized its importance, and are taking adequate measures to enhance the standard of higher education, are counted in the best ranking education. HEC has been putting its possible efforts into practice to ensure the standard of education but the major obstacles are lack of committed faculty and R&D culture. Mohanthy (2000) envisages that quality of higher education depends upon R&D culture and motivated faculty to conduct research in order to upgrade their knowledge. Husain (2007) comments that research is a serious business and a university teacher is supposed to produce quality research in addition to his teaching assignments.

HEC is trying hard to streamline the universities to adopt quality assurance mechanism to improve the quality of their teaching and research. An instrumental approach has been suggested by HEC to enhance the quality of higher education which begins by establishing a mission, followed by the functions that have to be carried out to achieve the mission and the objectives. A quality management system is then recommended to ensure the quality of the programmes. Lastly, an internal system is proposed to assess the effectiveness of the management system. Best practice also requires that the implementation of the quality assurance programmes preceded by a strong commitment on the part of the university leaders and managers to quality advancement (Tovey, 1992). An important reason is that it will improve the quality and relevance of their graduates and research programs and thus enable universities to play a more effective role in the economy of the country.

The study aimed to look into:

- HEC initiatives to enhance R&D in the universities,
- Implications of these initiatives on human resource development, and
- Major successes and failures in the result of these initiatives.

Historical Perspectives

HEC has established quality assurance agency to safeguard public interest by enforcing sound standards in higher education and encouraging continuous improvement by reviewing and developing higher education benchmarks and quality criteria. Rahman (2007) says that HEC lays a particular focus on the institution of quality enhancement, assurance, accreditation, mechanisms and universities across the country sustainable improvement in the delivery of higher education requires the development of a mechanism for continuous self-monitoring and improvement of the system. Saeed, Rafi, Ahmed, & Rauf. The

quality assurance initiatives improve the quality and relevance of the graduates and research programs, and thus enable universities to play a more effective role in the economy. The basis for this belief is in the finding that education contributes to economic growth in a number of ways (Asian Development Bank, 1989; Denison, 1967; Psacharopoulos, 1988; Schultz, 1961). First, it improves generally the quality of labour by imparting skills and work knowledge. Second, it increases labour mobility and therefore promotes the division of labour. Third, it improves management skills which lead to more efficient location of resources. Fourth, it removes many of the social and institutional barriers to economic growth. Finally, it encourages entrepreneurship by promoting individual responsibility, organizational ability, moderate risk-taking, and long-term planning. The generation of new knowledge and efficient dissemination of existing knowledge is a key responsibility of institutions of higher learning (Siddiqui, 2007). Over 30% of the growth in per capital income may be attributed to technological innovation. Most of the technological advances in the second half of the 20 century including new bio-technological industries, telecommunications, information technological, and advanced materials (such as semi-conductors, fibre optics, etc.) have their origins in university research (University of President's Council, 2001).

The present study aims to explore current practices of HEC to improve R & D culture, and their implications on HRD. The study also draws on major successes and failures in the result of these initiatives. The study addresses these questions based on the following research framework.

Research procedure

Qualitative and quantitative methods were applied for data analysis. The data were elicited and observed through reports, documents and articles. For this purpose, Pakistan Council for Science and Technology and HEC resources were taken into account to address the aspects mentioned above.

Result and data analysis

Since its inception in September 2002, HEC has been trying to transfer Pakistan from plantation economy to knowledge economy. It has reached in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Germany, Italy, Austria and China to setup 9 Engineering and Science and Technology universities. This programme may have a significant impact on the future development of Pakistan especially in the industrial sector. As it is indicated in figure 1 that growth of universities increased steadily after 2002, however, nearly equal proportion was found between private and public Quality in Higher Education:

Issues and Current Practices

sector universities expansion till 2006. But it seemed considerable growth in the expansion of public sector universities from 2007 to 2010. On the other hand, there had been a slight increase in the number of private sector universities since 2007. Total number of higher education institutions dramatically increased in the past few years. This ever increases in the growth of higher education institutions in Pakistan provided opportunities to millions of students to seek higher education.

Conclusion

Spending huge revenue for education may give a nudge to universities but reinforcement of quality criteria is crucial to improve the standard of education. The HEC has been taking initiatives on different fronts to cure some of the chronic problems since its inception. But close observance of quality criteria implemen-

tation Quality in Higher Education: Issues and Current Practices 50 will bring more fruitful results. It means the HEC requires to work as co-partner with the higher education institutions in Pakistan. The state ought to support and encourage the HEC to bring indigenous universities at par with international universities. A dynamic world-class research culture is vital for the acquisition of knowledge and health of the universities. It is also crucial to the economic growth and social cohesion. The HEC and the universities in Pakistan can play a vital role in the development of Pakistan. The universities should encourage and provide opportunities to participate in some healthy academic activities e.g. national and international conferences, publications in national and international journals. The faculty contribution to the respective field should be evaluated and rewarded with annual increment. The universities and the concerned organizations need to create a congenial and supportive working environment and to develop a vision to boost up the quality.

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